

ADVICE:
**From Montana
Schools**



Advice From Montana Schools on Marketing Healthful Foods to Youth

This information is from elementary, middle and high schools across Montana. These schools each received a Nutrition SENSE Mini-Grant to support their efforts in selling and marketing healthful foods and beverages to students through student run stores.

We would like to thank these schools for their efforts in helping Montana youth purchase healthy items and for sharing their lessons learned with us.

Phase One Pilot Project Schools

- **Billings Career Education Center Entrepreneurship/Small Business Class** Billings School District #2
- **Bozeman High School DECA chapter** Bozeman School District
- **Custer County High School FFA chapter** Miles City School District
- **Huntley Project High School FCCLA chapter** Huntley Project School District
- **Terry High School FCCLA chapter** Terry School District

Phase Two Pilot Project Schools

Elementary Level:

- **Arrowhead School** Pray Montana
- **Central Intermediate Student Store** Sidney School District
- **Jefferson Elementary School Student Council** Helena School District
- **Lewis and Clark Elementary School** Great Falls School District
- **Smith Elementary School Stop and Go Store** Helena School District
- **East Middle School** National Junior Honor Society, Great Falls School District
- **Paris Gibson Middle School Zippo's Stuff School Store** Great Falls School District

High School Level:

- **Capital High School Bear Necessities/Small Business Management Class** Helena School District
- **Plevna High School FCCLA chapter** Plevna School District
- **Sidney High School Resources Unlimited Store** Sidney School District
- **Three Forks High School FCCLA chapter** Three Forks School District
- **Twin Bridges High School Family & Consumer Sciences/Culinary Arts Class** Twin Bridges School District
- **White Sulphur Springs High School FCCLA chapter** White Sulphur Springs School District

DECA stands for Distributive Education Clubs of America | **FFA** stands for Future Farmers of America | **FCCLA** stands for Family, Career and Community Leaders of America

What do Montana schools consider to be the most vital components to being successful in selling healthful items to Montana youth in student stores?

1. Offer a variety of items at a variety of different prices (.25, .50, .75, \$1.00):

- Include grab and go items that are easy to eat on the run
- Include grains, fruits and vegetables, dairy, and protein foods.
- Vary the product line with the seasons. For example, sell calcium-fortified hot chocolate in the winter and fruit smoothies or frozen yogurt in the spring or fall.

2. Determine Customer Preferences:

- Survey students to find out the popular healthy snacks they prefer.
- Listen to what the kids want. Consider conducting a focus group with students who can offer ideas from everything from merchandise to pricing.
- Keep TASTE in mind when offering healthy foods so kids will purchase them.

3. Close Monitoring:

- Keep track of what sells to minimize inventory and to make sure your popular items are stocked.
- Pay attention to keeping adequate amounts of healthy foods on hand but don't over buy as many of them are perishable.
- Have the same person be responsible for counting the money each day so they can closely track the store's cash on hand.

4. Advertising:

- Get the message out when the store is open, and that popular healthy and tasty items are available at reasonable prices. Consider having a Grand Opening!
- Use colorful packaging that appeals to kids.
- Promote healthy products in a trendy, fun way. For example, offer free samples to elicit enthusiasm and word of mouth selling. Other marketing ideas include host a "free snack day", give gift certificates for a nutritious snack, and offer coaches and teachers prize or reward certificates to help introduce new foods to the students.
- Put all beverages in a large container (on ice) on the counter, so it appears there is a greater selection.

5. Offer Competitive Pricing:

- Purposely offer some items for .25 cents so everyone can afford something.
- Pay attention to price as students have to be able to afford the items. Price items very reasonably and make them cheaper than the vending machines. Offer items at \$1.00 or less in price.
- If possible, shut down the vending machines while the store is open.

6. Product Availability and Accessibility:

- Availability of the products is essential. You need to be able to easily purchase items for the student store in order to ensure an on-going supply.
- The store should be open when the students are hungry and offer easy to eat foods.
- Make the foods visually accessible. For example have glass front coolers and counter displays of healthful food items at eye level to help market these items to students.
- Do not offer unhealthy choices.

7. Education:

- Providing healthy snack ideas to parents and teachers as well as a continued commitment not to go back to selling candy or other foods of low nutritional value.
- Get buy-in from school staff.
- Educate yourself on food products that are healthful and available through your vendors and then try them out on the youth market.
- Educate staff, students, and parents regarding healthy snack choices.
- Educate the students on what is healthy by teaching them to read the label and advertising the nutritional benefits of the items.

What are the Top Selling Items for Stores in Elementary Schools and How Much are Students Willing to Pay for Them?

ITEM	PRICE SOLD TO STUDENTS
Frozen Fruit Juice Bars .....	.50
Granola Bars/Nutri-Grain Bar .....	.50
Beef Jerky .....	.30 -.40 – 1.00
Go-Gurts (squeezable yogurt) .....	.35 -.40 – .50
Sunflower Seeds (package) .....	.50
Peanut Tubes .....	.50
String Cheese.....	.25 - .50
Orange or Apple Juice.....	.25 - .50
Capri Sun Juice Drink.....	.50
Chex Mix .50	
Ritz Bitz Cheese Crackers .....	.50

ITEM	PRICE SOLD TO STUDENTS
Pretzels.....	.25
Popcorn.....	.50
Garden of Eatin' .....	.50
Fruit Roll-Ups .....	.50
Teddy Grahams .....	.25
Ice Cream Push Ups .....	.35
Instant Cup of Soup.....	.50
Cup of Macaroni and Cheese	1.25
Mini-Pizza	1.25
Nachos with Cheese Sauce	1.25

What are the Top Selling Items for Stores in the Middle Schools and How Much are Students Willing to Pay for Them?

ITEM	PRICE SOLD TO STUDENTS
Lowrey's Beef Jerky .....	.50
Slim Jims/Beef Jerky.....	.50/.75
Dole Frozen Fruit Barks.....	.50
Swiss Miss Hot Chocolate.....	.50
Fruit Juice.....	.50
Go-Gurt (blueberry/strawberry) .....	.50
Chocolate Pudding .....	.50

ITEM	PRICE SOLD TO STUDENTS
Nature Valley Strawberry Yogurt Bars.....	.50
Kudos Granola Bars.....	.50
Cheese/Peanut Butter Sandwich Crackers .....	.50
String Cheese (teachers favorite snack!) .....	.30
Homemade Smoothie* (see recipe below)	1.00
Big Sky Bagels & Cream Cheese.....	1.00
Smoothies*	1.00

*Zippo's Stuff Smoothie Recipe = 10 ounce serving: Blend together 2 ounces apple juice, 1 Tablespoon honey, 2 ounces vanilla yogurt, 4 ounces frozen fruit (strawberries or frozen fruit) and some or all of a frozen banana (bananas provide flavor and avoid the need for ice.) Add a dollop of Redi Whip to top of smoothie.

What are the Top Selling Items for Stores in the High Schools and How Much are Students Willing to Pay for Them?

ITEM	PRICE SOLD TO STUDENTS	ITEM	PRICE SOLD TO STUDENTS
String Cheese.....	.25 - .50	PB and J Uncrustable (Smuckers) .....	.75
Pudding Cup .....	.25	Beef Jerky (pucks- .25) .....	.25-.50 - 1.25
Go-Gurt Yogurt .....	.25 - .50	Honey Roasted Nuts .....	.50
Yogurt (8 oz.) .....	.75	Chocolate Milk (16 oz.) .....	.75
Granola Bar (generic brand) .....	.25	Minute Maid Juice Box (6 oz.) .....	.25
Cheese and Crackers (Ritz Cheese) .....	.50	Fruit Juice (16 oz.)	1.00
Corn Nuts .....	.65	Water (16 oz.)	1.00
Pretzels (soft) .....	.75	V-8 Splash Drinks (16 oz.)	1.25
Bagels .....	.50	V-8 Juice .....	.25
Blueberry Muffin .....	.50	Smoothies (made with frozen mixes*)	1.25 – 2.00
Breakfast Bar (Cinnamon Toast Crunch) .....	.50	Starbucks (Mocha, Vanilla, Carmel)	1.00
Yogurt Bar (Kellogg's Nutri-grain) .....	.50	Italian Sodas	2.00

*\$1.25 Smoothie was made with Island Oasis frozen fruit, yogurt, and ice. The \$2.00 Smoothie (16 oz) was made with Sahara Burst Premix (Strawberry, Tropical and Peach) with ice.

What Montana Students & School Staff Had to Say About Selling Nutritious Snacks...

At the ELEMENTARY level:

"The response from the kids was positive. Kids liked the variety and the fact that our prices were sometimes lower than what was traditionally offered at our ice cream store". Parents commented favorably.

"The project was very successful. We had a good turnout of students each time our Nutritious Store was open."

"All responses were positive. Parents and staff were very happy. The students love the healthy snack option. We were surprised that kids chose healthy snacks over candy." One parent was overheard saying, "I would have given him money every week if I knew you sold this stuff."

"Many teachers felt that the letters sent home to the parents brought the topic to the forefront and helped to raise awareness of healthy snacks. Other teachers commented that it was surprising to note that kids bought healthy snacks, crackers, pretzels, etc. more than they bought candy."

"Staff, parents, and students really appreciate the opportunity to purchase snacks that are healthy. I think the students enjoy a variety of healthy snacks."

At the MIDDLE SCHOOL level:

"Overall, students and staff have been very receptive of our nutrition project. Before we began, some students were upset that our project would take their food choices away from them. After the store opened, however, I saw only crowds of students around the store. Even though we turned the vending machines off, students were satisfied with the snacks available at the store."

"Our staff and students were extremely supportive. They loved the novelty of the products that we sold and we kept adding new things. The crowds rushed in for the smoothies and we called them creative things like Our Mascot, The Panther, and Tropical Delight. We positioned ourselves right from the beginning that we were not a candy store. We sold nutritious snacks, school supplies and message grams. Students liked the variety and the choices. "

At the HIGH SCHOOL level:

"Students appreciated having a nutritious alternative to the candy and pop machine. At an end of the year staff meeting, I was specifically asked to continue the project for next year even if the prices of the items needed to be increased. I am very pleased because as a result of the project, students and the public now have healthy snack choices that were not available before."

"The students and school staff were very positive about the store offering nutritious foods. They were very receptive and had great ideas for nutritious foods they would like to see offered."

"Staff members stop by and purchase snacks for themselves. Staff members have also started giving gift certificates to students as prizes or rewards for class activities. Using a certificate allows students to make their own choices rather than giving everyone a candy bar. "

"Even though there was a negative response from staff initially, their acceptance was good by the end of the trial period. In fact, some teachers were allowing students to finish their breakfasts in class as long as the garbage was thrown away. We didn't find one single food wrapper anywhere!"

"Mrs. Coleman, do you have any more snacks? This was a question that I heard over and over after we started the mid-morning weekly nutritious snack. The students were very happy to have new foods in the store. The staff was also very accepting of the project and the superintendent and principal were very supportive."

"The administration was very supportive. Some teachers were concerned with the garbage but after visiting with the janitor, no problems were evident. Students were always ready to try out a new snack or new flavor of jerky or corn nuts. They would often ask what the new product was."

Words of Wisdom from Store/Project Advisors

At the ELEMENTARY level:

"I feel great about the healthy snacks. I feel like we are not compromising our principles to make money. I feel like we don't have to justify running the store – no guilt. It makes me feel good because I am practicing what I preach."

At the MIDDLE SCHOOL level:

"Students crave healthy options in addition to food service and vending machine choices. I think we have a responsibility and an opportunity in our schools to promote nutrition through an exciting, student-driven school store. It is important to mention that our school store is an integrated project between General and Special Education programming. Special Education students learn social skills in a real, applied way from positive role models. We would like to see the school store as a "lab" where students can apply their knowledge as well as promote healthy nutrition. School store employees developed their leadership skills."

At the HIGH SCHOOL level:

"Students are the best advertisers. If you can convince them the food tastes good and is good for them, they will buy it. That is what we tried by giving out the free samples."

"Three critical elements were a) showing the students we were not anti-sugar, b) we were open when we said we would, and c) the greater variety of beverages and breakfast bars we had the more we sold."

"For a school that does not have a student store, I would encourage them to try to start one. When ours was started it was a cooperative effort among all the vocational classes. It is a great learning experience for all involved and it benefited the school because our store is converted to the concession stands on weekend. It does not have to be fancy. A club can sell foods from any classroom. Learn what the students like and keep in mind food storage needs. You want to be able to store foods easily and safely. Make the students take ownership for deciding what they will buy by asking them in a survey and interviews. "

"Availability of product is the key to being successful in selling snacks. You have to be able to consistently offer the product at a reasonable price."

Be Prepared for the Challenges of Operating a Student Store

1. Responsibility of Running a Student Store:

Students struggle with book-keeping aspects, staffing for the store hours, and committing the "time" needed to purchase and restock the items. It is also hard to take the time it requires to keep track of inventory, expenditures and profits.

Action Steps to Meet the Challenge From the beginning, the Project Advisor needs to be very clear with students on the level of commitment required. It is important to have adequate staff to handle the key tasks of a running a store.

It is recommended to set up four committees with student chairs for each committee to address:

1) bookkeeping tasks, 2) staffing tasks, 3) inventory tasks, and 4) marketing/promotion tasks.

Don't forget training is needed to operate a successful store. Training is necessary in food safety, product line and prices, handling money, stocking of items, and daily cleaning.

2. Staffing for the Student Store:

Students often struggle with committing time to staff the store as it interferes with their social times at lunch, recess or before or after school hours.

Action Steps to Meet the Challenge Once a store is open, it is very important to have adequate staff to maintain regular hours of operations. It is recommended to open the store with a limited number of hours that is adequately staffed rather than to try to be open for more hours than you can consistently staff.

Offer incentives for students who will work a specific number of hours a week or a month. Rotate the staff's schedule so they are not always working during lunch or recess. This will help alleviate the problem of them missing out on that time to socialize with their peers.

Provide an incentive to students for being reliable, honest and hard working employees. For example, if a student normally works a two-week shift each month, give them a coupon for \$1.50 to the store after they have completed their monthly shift. If adequate staffing is not possible, you may want to consider purchasing a vending machine to sell the products rather than operating a "student-run" store.

3. Advertising and Promotion:

In order to attract customers, promotion and marketing efforts are necessary on an ongoing basis. Customers need constant reminders and incentives to visit the store and to become aware of store hours and items available for purchase.

Action Steps to Meet the Challenge Develop and implement a marketing/promotion plan right from the start of your store operation. This plan outlines how you will reach your customers and what necessary signage/flyers that may need to be developed to market the store hours and product line. It is critical for your customers to know store hours, product line and for the store personnel to know how you can satisfy their "snack" needs. Be sure to market to school staff and parents too, as they are all potential customers and can support your store from a financial standpoint (provide money to students for purchases.)

Good customer service is a very important way to market your store. Treating customers well can be the best way to market your store. Word of mouth marketing can make or break your store. You may want to adopt the philosophy "If you have a problem, please tell us. If you have a compliment, please tell a friend."

4. Inventory Control:

It is important to implement a system to closely monitor inventory to prevent overstocking or running out of items. Close monitoring of perishable items (dairy, produce, bakery products) is vital to ensuring quality control and avoid spoilage problems of items.

Action Steps to Meet the Challenge Implement inventory control measures right from the start of your operation to avoid over-or under-stocking and to discourage theft. Staff and customers need to "perceive" that you have "tight" inventory controls to run a financially sound operation and to avoid the temptation to steal. Devise and utilize an inventory stock form that lists items and provides a "par inventory level" for each item. This form can be used to take a physical inventory at the end of each week before you make restock food or supplies. It will help you maintain a good record of inventory. Utilize the Daily Inventory/Profit Sheet developed by Huntley Project High School FCCLA chapter which can be found in this section on page 44.

5. Theft:

Student stores need mechanisms in place to discourage theft and maintain close control of cash sales and inventory. Students need to believe they will get caught if they attempt to pilfer goods or money.

Action Steps to Meet the Challenge

- Store all food items in a locked cabinet or refrigerated unit. The student advisor should be responsible for the key.
- If students working a shift want to purchase items, have them do it from the student advisor only (not other students).
- The cash box should be kept in a secure area under adult supervision. The student advisor should supervise the counting of the money. It is a good idea to have the same person count the "till" each day and record the balance so you keep close track of the cash on hand. A good record keeping system should be in place for tracking revenue, expenses, and determining net profits.

Develop and implement an incentive program for reliable and honest workers so they have a vested interest in the store. If the profits are helping to benefit the students in some way, they may work harder to help it be successful.

Daily Inventory/Profit Sheet

MONTH _____ **DEPOSIT** _____ **STUDENT NAME** _____

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Developed by Jean Ott, Huntley Project High School FCCLA Chapter, Huntley Project, Montana, 2003